

Guantanamo Detainees Do Not Belong at Ft. Leavenworth

May 5, 2009

Mr. Speaker, in January, shortly after taking office, President Obama ordered the closure of the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base within the year. Up to 250 detainees who are suspects from the war on terrorism will be processed and moved, possibly to facilities located inside the United States. The U.S. disciplinary barracks at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, is apparently one of the facilities under consideration to house these prisoners.

I have visited Fort Leavenworth, the city of Leavenworth, and surrounding communities. I have talked to city officials, local businesses, and State legislators. I have spoken to U.S. military officers and foreign military students attending the Army's Command and General Staff College located at the fort.

Simply stated, Fort Leavenworth is a poor fit for placing Guantanamo detainees. Fort Leavenworth is known as the "Intellectual Center of the Army," where the leaders of our military and foreign militaries are educated. However, should these politically sensitive detainees be located at the fort, many countries will likely discontinue sending military students to America to be trained. This action would disrupt Fort Leavenworth's primary mission of military education. It

would greatly impair a successful international military student program that has spread good will around the world for 100 years.

Additionally, our country should not make Fort Leavenworth's soldiers and their families and northeast Kansas unfairly bear this responsibility at the cost of their safety and economic well-being. The 3,000 residents who live on post as well as the residents of nearby communities would be living at a higher security risk. Since the fort has no major medical facilities, dangerous detainees would need to be transported to a local hospital or V.A. for medical attention. Local public safety officials are not capable of handling a terrorist incident or protests that may occur and would require greater resources. The need to increase security at the fort would likely close off citizen access to Sherman Airfield, the only public airport in Leavenworth, as well as stop rail and river barge traffic that runs to the post. These actions would have significant economic consequences.

Finally, the fort's disciplinary barracks lack the capability to house terrorist suspects. It is largely a medium-security facility for military prisoners. It would cost hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade the disciplinary barracks to maximum security level and to construct the hospital, residential, and support facilities that would be required to house the additional prisoners and security personnel. As a small post surrounded by a civilian population, there is no room to grow.

Fort Leavenworth is clearly an unsuitable location. I am a sponsor of legislation introduced by my colleague of Kansas, Ms. Jenkins, to prevent Guantanamo detainees from being relocated there.

The decision to close Guantanamo Bay detention facility and relocate terror suspects should not be made recklessly. I'm troubled that the administration is seeking to move forward on Guantanamo despite the absence of a closure and relocation plan and despite the lack of congressional review. In their recently submitted FY 09 war supplemental request to Congress, they ask us for \$80 million to close the Guantanamo detention facility to relocate prisoners, support personnel and services.

I join the gentleman from California, Representative Hunter, in asking the Appropriations Committee not to include this funding in the supplemental until we see a plan. Still lacking these details this week, I'm pleased to see that our appropriations chairman, Mr. Obey, announced his refusal to provide the funding.

This critical national security decision deserves critical thought. Detainees should not be moved where they do not belong. And detainees do not belong at Fort Leavenworth.